

2008

Exploring the BA and BFA Curriculum

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June 16, 2008

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EXPLORING THE BA AND BFA CURRICULUM

A Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts at Virginia Commonwealth University.

by

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August, 2008

Acknowledgement

There are many people I wish to thank for helping me along my academic career. Most recently, I could not have done this without the help from Barry Bell, Craig A. Humphrey and of course, Noreen C. Barnes. I have learned so much from all three of you and am so grateful to you and the time and energy you have spent on me; an extra thank you to Noreen who gave me so many wonderful opportunities and made history exciting for me. A special thank you to John DeBoer who helped out in a time of need!

As this thesis is about my teaching there are several teachers/directors/coaches etc. that I would like to thank as well; Craig A. Humphrey, again, as he has seen me at my worst and best and is still willing to be there for me; Mr. Harvey Cocks who believed in me enough to give me my first teaching job; Dianne Giannakeff, Nancy Carlson and Mrs. Antibus who each taught me the value of theatre in the church; Elaine Nickell because she always cast me in the chorus (the best lesson of all); Richard and Sally Frazier - the ultimate teachers - I have learned more from them than they will ever know or understand; and to all of those unofficial teachers that I was either in shows with and/or was directed by as I truly believe we learn in many places other than a classroom!

I have a very special thank you to the late Larry L. Life. He always pushed me so hard and sometimes I pushed right back. Larry loved his students and wanted them to succeed more than anything. He proved that you can teach style, grace and timing. I will end with one of his favorite lines from *Gypsy*, "Sing Out Louise!"

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Abstract

EXPLORING THE BA AND BFA CURRICULUM

By Jane R. Frazier, MFA

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts at Virginia Commonwealth University.

Virginia Commonwealth University, 2008

Major Director: Dr. Noreen C. Barnes
Director of Graduate Studies, Department of Theatre

This thesis is a picture of my journey as an educator. I taught at the University level from Fall 2001 – Summer 2006 before I became a graduate student at Virginia Commonwealth University in Theatre Pedagogy where I continued to teach until 2008. My education and real life experiences over the last seven plus years have contributed to my teaching methodology which is ever evolving. There were several trials and tribulations as I progressed as an educator and this is an exploration of my experience teaching in the BA and BFA curriculums.

My Story of IPFW

I have spent the last six and a half years teaching at the University level and in that time I have discovered many things about my style of teaching and my own personal growth and awareness. Most of us have interesting career journeys and I wish to explore mine while delving into the curriculum of the BA and BFA programs.

It all started when in the summer of 2001 a dear friend of mine became ill and asked if I could be her substitute for a class she was teaching at IPFW (Indiana University – Purdue University Fort Wayne). We had both graduated from IPFW and had performed or worked backstage on several productions there. It was a small faculty and my friend was adjunct faculty teaching a Fundamentals of Performance class. This particular class, a beginning acting class required (at this time) for all theatre majors, was also open to anyone on campus to take. IPFW students also had several general education requirements before they could graduate and this class was just one they could chose from the Creative & Artistic Expression category.

Since this class was during a summer session, the only other theatre faculty on campus was the chair, Larry L. Life, and he agreed I could help the instructor out with a few classes. This meant the students could continue with their training and she could take a few days off if she needed to.

I had graduated from IPFW in May of 2000 and had just completed my one and only year teaching theatre at a local private middle and high school. I was needed for a few days when the instructor wasn't feeling well enough to come in. I hesitantly said yes, but she assured me I would be fine. I was basically there to take attendance and to make sure the students were working on their scenes/monologues etc. and being productive.

The students welcomed me with open arms and by the third day I felt very confident. Some of them had even asked me to help them with their scenes and character analysis. The trust had already begun and a connection had been made. I remember watching their final scenes feeling proud that they had accomplished the goals they made for themselves. My friend was very grateful and told me I should think about teaching at the University level.

While I enjoyed those three or so days of substitute teaching, I really wasn't confident enough to proceed with that idea. I thought who am I to teach others how to act? What do I know and how do you even put together a lesson plan or syllabus? I left the idea alone and proceeded to be a substitute teacher in the Fort Wayne Community School system.

As the 2001 Fall semester approached it looked like my friend was not going to be able to teach at all. Larry only had a few weeks to decide what he was going to do. I suppose the other faculty already had full schedules and couldn't be freed up to teach this class. He offered it to me. It was one section of Fundamentals of Performance, and since it was in the evenings I could still substitute teach. After being persuaded by other faculty

members, I decided to take on the challenge, both to help out the school and because I could always use the extra money.

I had a few weeks to learn how to teach acting to theatre majors (performance and other) as well as non-theatre majors. I had been teaching acting to 5 – 11 graders at the Fort Wayne Youtheatre since 1998, so I was used to being in front of a classroom. Now, however, the students were paying much more for my knowledge which unsettled my stomach even more. That first semester was crazy to say the least. I studied my friend's syllabus and lesson plans as if I were to be tested over them. For the most part I taught exactly what she would have taught, with only a few minor changes in acting exercises. I felt more comfortable using some of the ones I had been using for years with my Youtheatre students and reformatting them for college – level training. Looking back on this experience, I am surprised that I got through that semester. I did receive some help from faculty but still felt that I had been thrown to the wolves.

Since I was so new to teaching at a University (and used to dealing with middle school children), I kept detailed notes about what happened in the classroom and grading, attendance, etc. I had never learned about different teaching methodologies before but decided I should just be myself. I believed that if I was honest with my students, they in turn would be honest with me.

There was a required book for this class, *Acting Onstage and Off* by Robert Barton, and this helped me structure the class. However, I found I really didn't like the order of his chapters. It didn't make logical sense to me. There were important terms that I felt needed to be learned early on in the semester but Barton didn't get to them until chapter 6.

This was one thing I decided I would change for next semester, if they allowed me to teach again.

Grading the students' performances was somewhat easy and I made sure they knew exactly what I was grading on and what I expected of them. Grading their written assignments was a bit more difficult. I myself was not a confident writer and it would take me hours to grade one paper. Written work included character analysis, journal entries and papers about IPFW productions.

The biggest situation that I had to deal with during Fall 2001 was of course, the September 11 terrorist attacks. There were no books or lesson plans to help me prepare discussing this with my students. I was home the day it happened and sat glued to the television. It overwhelmed me and at some point in the afternoon I remembered I had to teach the following evening and had no idea what to say to my students. I called other faculty members to see if they had canceled classes and to see what they were planning to do about the situation. While some classes had been canceled on 9/11 it was up to the individual faculty whether or not they wanted to continue classes the following day. I decided not to cancel as most of my students would not have been immediately impacted by this event and I didn't want to get off schedule.

I tend to arrive early to my classes and as I and some of my students waited to get into our room I was surprised that no one even mentioned 9/11. It was as if it hadn't even happened. This was the very next day, after all the news reports had been going on all day and night and day again. As I started class (with all of my students there) I asked if anyone had been following the coverage of the 9/11 events. Everyone knew about it and some

were much more involved in it than others. I decided to discuss it and see what their thoughts were on the matter. We ended up having a very interesting discussion about how it wasn't affecting them as much as I thought it would. After a 30 minute discussion we all decided that it would be best to get on with our class. Everyone wanted to go on with their work; some because they didn't want to think about the event and some because it just hadn't hit them yet.

We did go on, but within the next few weeks I saw a change in my students. They became more aware of what 9/11 meant and that it would affect us even though we were in Indiana. We did a traditional open scene exercise where the students are given open scripts with only a few lines for actor 1. and a few for actor 2. They must follow the script as written, but they decide who their characters are and what their environment is and what story they are telling. Most of these first open scenes were very serious and we even had some break downs within the class. This concerned me at first because I wanted them to experience not only the bad but also the good; but as the semester went on the students did choose comedies and such for their monologues and other scene work.

They had used theatre to release something. Something that had to get out and I believe it did get out and helped them deal with their own confused feelings about what was happening to our world. It was one of the first times that I saw the power of theatre. Of course I had experienced this before with certain plays I was in or had seen; but this was the first time I was "in charge" of a group of theatre and non-theatre people creating; whether or not the pieces were "good" didn't matter because the students created from their souls and we all would never forget that process.

I was amazed at how much I had learned along with my students. The semester was very overwhelming but also so satisfying at the same time. I wanted more and was granted another class in the Spring 2002 semester.

I made some changes to the syllabus. I found the students needed more time on their feet with acting exercises. They needed to learn how to trust each other even though they didn't necessarily know each other well. I also wanted to spend more time with them on their monologues. The changes happened slowly though because I was afraid of straying too far from the path. After all, this was only my second semester of teaching at the University and I wasn't totally confident that my style of teaching was the best.

I also began a second part-time position at IPFW as the assistant to the Dean of the School of Visual and Performing Arts. I had a wonderful semester of discovering arts administration and how it fit in with teaching and learning. As the Spring semester progressed I was knee deep in the arts and loving every minute of it.

Larry, the theatre department chair, then asked me to teach the same class during both six week summer sessions. I jumped at the chance. During the Fall and Spring semesters, Fundamentals of Performance met for either two days a week for 1 hour and 15 minutes each day, or three days a week for 50 minutes each day. There were 16 weeks in the semester with one week of finals. During the summer semesters the class met three days a week for 2 hours and 20 minutes for a total of 6 weeks. Whether the students took the class in the Fall, Spring or Summer semester they were guaranteed 40 – 42 hours of instruction time.

Obviously I had to re-format how much we were to accomplish within a class period for summer. That was easy enough and I felt that after the Spring of 2002 semester I had come up with a format for teaching the class that best suited the students and myself. However, I wasn't thinking about the incubation time. Students had much more time to let concepts sink in during the Fall and Spring semesters. This meant a lot of review was necessary during the summer semesters. I quickly adapted; but I didn't think about the memorization time. Previously the students needed to have all performances memorized, (Open Scenes, Monologues and Final Scenes.)

The open scenes weren't too long so they could still be off book for those. I shortened the time for monologues so we could still have about the same time on our final scenes. Therefore, I did not make the students memorize their monologues, but if they wanted to I would give them extra credit for that.

This really didn't work out too well during the first summer session as many chose not to memorize and ended up mostly reading from their scripts. During the second summer session I made sure I emphasized that they be at least mostly off book (where they could look up from the script) during their monologues. While some students had a problem with this, most handled it well.

As I had now worked with over 70 students I had learned how to work with different learning types and throughout the Fall 2002 semester I started to incorporate several different ways to memorize a script. I didn't really think about these changes as I made them. They happened very organically to address the situation at hand. It wasn't

until I came to graduate school that I even realized how my own teaching pedagogy was changing.

My fellow faculty members now trusted me with more work. During the 2002 – 2003 school year I taught two sections of Fundamentals of Performance each semester. I didn't change a lot about how I taught this class but I found I needed to be much more detailed in my class notes as I noticed I was having trouble remembering what I had talked about in different classes. This was a simple fix and made me a much more organized person.

I felt very confident in my teaching skills this year as I had received good evaluations from my students and faculty members. I also noticed something else, something I never expected. I became a better *actor* the more I taught these basic acting classes. Because I had to learn how to communicate my thoughts in several different ways and because I was reviewing the basics of acting every semester, my own acting technique became more detailed, precise and I became a more relaxed actor.

The Theatre department had been going through several changes as it was delving deeper into its self study meetings. Some curriculum changes were made, one being in the Fundamentals of Performance class. It was decided that all theatre majors did not have to take this class. As the chair accepted students into the program, he would decide whether or not a major needed to take this class. As a result, I saw less and less majors in my classes.

This helped the non-majors (psychologically anyway) because they felt less threatened by “the people that were going to make this their career.” However, I didn't

really find myself changing the class a lot due to this. I still found that even if a student was a theatre major it didn't necessarily mean they had any idea of the basics. (Several didn't even know where upstage and downstage were) But I did discuss how the students could use this information for their own majors. This was always part of the class but now I mentioned specific things depending on what their major was.

I continued to teach both summer sessions in 2003 and starting in the Fall not only would I continue my two sections of Fundamentals but now I was also handed one section of Acting I. This was a more in-depth look at acting and all theatre majors and all theatre minors had to take this class. Other students who had previously taken Fundamentals of Performance could also take this class.

It was great to be considered for this position but I felt I had gone backwards a bit in my confidence level. I started asking myself the same questions I had before the Fall of 2001. What could I offer these students? This is their career choice, so how do I give them the tools they need to move to the next level?

I calmed myself down and was excited to take the challenge. The Fundamentals class had taken place in our only studio classroom. Acting I was in our studio theatre which set the tone. I was very happy that the spaces were so different. This helped to differentiate the two classes. The Acting I students would be using a stage and it helped them make a psychological change as well, especially if they had taken Fundamentals before.

Again, I learned so much this semester. There were two required books for this class, *Acting One* by Robert Cohen and *An Actor Prepares* by Stanislavski. I was ashamed

that I had never read these books before. When I came into this department as a student I was tested out of Fundamentals and Acting I due to my training at previous schools. I spent my summer reading and re-reading both of these books.

I wanted to make sure I was giving the students the skills to become better actors and preparing them for Acting II. I met with the head of acting and she went over her Acting I syllabus with me. I was confused. It didn't make any sense to me and even after talking to her for over an hour I still wasn't sure what she needed them to know. I asked other faculty members and again decided that I did indeed have enough knowledge about acting and this department to come to my own conclusion.

The head of acting told me that the students didn't have to read all of *Acting One*; that I could just do exercises from this book. I found some I really liked and used them. She also said they didn't have to read all of *An Actor Prepares* but just the chapters I thought were important. I didn't understand this. I mean if we thought the book was important enough to teach then why wouldn't we teach all of it? So I decided that I would teach all of it.

As with the Fundamentals book, the students had to read certain chapters by certain dates and we would discuss them. I would answer any questions I could and I wanted them to relate it to their own acting, keeping in mind that Stanislavski wrote in a totally different time period. This worked only marginally. Many didn't read it or only skimmed and I'm not sure I taught it well enough.

At this time, Acting I was only offered in the Fall semester so in the Spring I was back to only my two sections of Fundamentals and then another summer of two sessions of

Fundamentals before I could teach Acting I again. I hated that I had a whole year off before teaching this class again. I felt that I had just gotten into it.

I truly believe this particular class pushed me to think about going to graduate school. I had discovered a love of teaching at the University before that class but I knew I needed to know more about theatre in order to truly be there for my students and make them the best theatre practitioners they could be. This decision has changed my life on so many levels.

A few weeks before the Fall 2004 semester started I noticed how many students Larry had put into my Acting I class. (over 26) While I had taught this many in a Fundamentals class, I just couldn't imagine trying to teach Acting I with this many students. Keep in mind, I still only had them two days a week at 1 hour and 15 minutes each class. How was I going to do everything I wanted to do? I begged Larry to stop adding students into this class. I told him I could handle more in a Fundamentals class, but not Acting I. We fought but he did stop adding them.

The first few weeks were a bit ridiculous. We barely had enough room to do our warm-up; however we made it work. While the students knew that I wasn't happy with the situation either, I assured them that we would still be able to learn and hoped we could all think positively.

Somehow we got through that cramped time and space and were still able to achieve our goals. I ended up changing a lot in the moment because I was never really sure what we would be able to accomplish with that many students in a class period. I am usually very rigid in my planning of time, but this semester started to break that habit.

Again, I taught my two sections of Fundamentals that semester as well as in the Spring semester and both summer sessions in 2005. I had auditioned for graduate schools at URTAs in the Spring of 2005 but I did not get any offers so it was back to IPFW I went.

The theatre department had decided to offer two sections of Acting I; one in the Fall and one in the Spring semester which meant I would have smaller classes again. I was very happy with this decision as I saw more and more of my previous Fundamentals students entering into the next stage of acting.

During the 2005 – 2006 school year I was allowed to partake in the weekly faculty meetings. I learned so much about how a department runs from this experience and am eternally grateful for it. As I delved even deeper into the world of academia I started to realize how my own education (not just my BA, but every new semester) was shaping my future. I was excited to take on more work and couldn't wait to see what the year would bring me. So, Fall of 2005 I taught Acting I plus two sections of Fundamentals; Spring, the same; and both 2006 summer sessions. Each had their own unique challenges that I confidently handled and in the Fall of 2006 I came to VCU. With opportunities abounding I was both excited and scared but ready to take on whatever obstacles put in front of me.

My Story of VCU

It took me a long time before I was ready for graduate school. Academics have never been easy for me and the thought of going back to school after being done with it for 6 years was very daunting. If I hadn't been teaching at the University during those 6 years I don't think I would have ever gone on to graduate school.

Once I was accepted I immediately asked if there were any classes I could teach. I wanted to keep my teaching skills up while taking classes and having some money coming in would help out. Dr. Noreen Barnes, director of theatre graduate studies, told me everything was filled up but there might be a speech class for me.

I did sign up to teach speech but at some point in the summer of 2006 I received an email from Dr. Barnes asking me to teach Acting I for VCU's theatre education and design students. I quickly agreed and once again found myself in the right place at the right time.

Once I moved to Richmond and settled in I decided I just couldn't handle teaching two classes while taking four graduate classes my first semester. I decided to drop the speech class as I was informed that several graduate students wanted and needed the teaching opportunity.

My contract for VCU was very different from the ones I had at IPFW and it seemed to come very late, but I signed it and was on my way. I taught my first class at VCU before I took my first class as a graduate student. That seemed odd at the time. I was used

to switching mind sets between administration and faculty but switching from faculty to student was a bit harder. It didn't take long though before I adjusted.

I was given very little structure as to what I was supposed to teach these students; which I found odd at first but eventually I was fine with this as I had been teaching for awhile and felt very confident in my teaching skills. I did notice that the performance majors used the same book as my IPFW Fundamentals of Performance students did; however at VCU they studied the book over four semesters of training. At IPFW I taught the book in one semester; however VCU's curriculum is modeled on conservatory training (for its undergraduates) and therefore went more in-depth with the concepts of the book where as IPFW's was really more of an overview of the book.

The theatre education and design students were not required to purchase this book so I had to rearrange some things on my syllabus. I really didn't want the students to have to buy it if no one else ever made them buy it – it is extremely expensive. I told the students about the book and referred to it in class several times; but other than that I just made copies of the exercises or sections of chapters I wanted to teach my students. This was a great opportunity for me as it made me pinpoint the exact material that I needed for my students. It helped me understand what I taught and why I taught it.

Another change was the fact that I had these students three days a week for one hour and 20 minutes each day. What was I supposed to do with them? That was an hour and a half more a week than at IPFW. For awhile I really wasn't sure why we needed that much time; but as I got into the semester and started to become aware of how the BFA program was run I started to enjoy all that time. The students had more opportunities for

longer working sessions with me and they could have a longer warm-up (which they needed) and I could throw more exercises at them. I loved this extra time!

As I walked into the classroom on the first day, I was amazed at how unkempt the room was. I started off in Shafer Street Playhouse, room 201. It was a nice studio space but disgusting. How on earth can I have students rolling around on the floor and actually feel comfortable about it? While the students didn't like it, they never complained about the floors, temperature or anything else about the space. Our class was moved to room 302 during that semester to help facilitate another class. It wasn't too much better than 201.

As the semester went on I noticed the biggest difference between BA students and BFA students was the fact that the BFA students barely ever discussed, argued or even mentioned any problems they may have with the room and such. They were very professional and that was a huge difference for me. The previous BA students I had worked with were not unprofessional, but more of them did tend to complain and whine about the space, or a particular exercise we would do, etc.

It wasn't that BFA students were more dedicated, but they were more willing to try anything and be positive about it. (Or at least they were positive about it to my face.) There are some variables here though one could say that either the BFA students are more willing to take risks or BA students are more willing to stand up for their rights. I don't view this as a good or bad thing but just a difference between the mindset of these programs. I feel I can teach a student no matter where their mindset may be – usually.

As the semester continued I grew more and more amazed at how these BFA students really knew what they wanted from life. At IPFW most theatre students start off

with an acting emphasis but by their Sophomore or Junior year 50% of them have switched over to another emphasis. (Education, Scene Design, Light Design, Costume Design, etc.) The students I worked with during that first semester were so confident in what they wanted and I think that helped them to take the appropriate risks to succeed in the class.

I'm not sure exactly how this was brought up, but sometime in October I either mentioned that I would miss these students come the Spring semester or maybe I had asked if they knew anyone that was taking this class in the Spring. I thought that I would have different students in the Spring because this was what I was used to and my contract was only for one semester. After class that day, one of my first year stage managers informed me that I was supposed to teach them the whole year. Imagine my surprise! A million things went through my mind. I had planned the class out as a semester class, what was I supposed to do with them next semester; how did I not realize this; how stupid did I look to the class?

Thankfully, the students had already come to realize that things get changed and communication is somewhat lacking at VCU and they did not care or think me stupid for not knowing this already.

I was really surprised that this had not been mentioned before October. I was upset that as a new graduate student (or even if I was a new adjunct instructor) no one informed me of the year breakdown; but I came to find out that there are a lot of things that VCU does differently than at home. This is not necessarily a bad thing. It was good that I taught at these two completely different schools because of course different schools handle many aspects of their training differently.

I also realized that as a graduate student there were many things I had to investigate for myself. No one was going to tell me the rules; they just expected me to know. As I calmed myself down I started working on my Spring semester syllabus to make sure the students continued to learn and that I wasn't wasting their time. I had taken out the monologue work for the Fall 2006 class because I wanted to concentrate on some observation exercises that I had been working on. So, monologues were put into my Spring 2007 syllabus.

At the end of the Fall semester I asked the students what they wanted from this class and several students wanted to work on group scenes. (3 or more people) I decided to add this to the syllabus for Spring as it would be a bit different than the two person scenes and would be a great challenge for them. I also included more improvisation work as well as more developed work in Stanislavski's system. I gave them handouts copied from the Robert Barton book *Acting Onstage and Off* and one of their new exercises was group teaching. Each group had to teach the rest of us one or two of Stanislavski's system steps. This was harder for them than I realized; and if I decide to use this again I will revamp the exercise but it was a good experience for them. After they taught us and I reviewed the concept I gave them a test over the material and they did much better.

As we would have extra time at the end of the Spring 2007 semester I added a new, non-graded project entitled: Performance piece. This was simply anything they wanted to put together for the class. There were no rules except to create. I wanted to see what they would come up with and again, while it was a bit difficult for them and I could have steered them better, it was a learning experience for all of us.

As teachers were being decided for the 2007 – 2008 school year, I was asked if I would like to teach the Acting I class for performance majors. I wanted to teach this class but didn't want to lose my theatre education / design students. I realized I would have all new students but I also realized that these students sometimes get treated as an afterthought and I felt that I worked well with them. I also wanted to incorporate a revamped creative project and build their communication skills while they were in their first year. If I had taught only the performance students I wouldn't have had as much freedom in my lesson plans and felt that as a graduate student I really needed this freedom to build on the lessons that I had been working on already. I suggested that I could teach a section of both performance students and education/design students but as this is a theatre pedagogy graduate program I realized there were many graduate students that wanted to and needed to teach. I decided to stay with my education/design students and I'm happy that I did.

Several professors questioned this and asked why I didn't want to teach the subject that I would teach once I graduated. I thought this was a strange question as I taught acting and had for several years and in my personal opinion it didn't matter if the student was a design major, a performance major or in a BA track or BFA track. It was still acting. Yes there are differences but it was still acting. I also knew I would be a TA for the Junior Performance acting studio and thought I was still getting to work with performance track students so I could have the best of both worlds.

I didn't change a lot from the Fall 2006 semester to the Fall 2007 semester besides some point values of projects but I did start incorporating more Tai Chi and Yoga into our daily warm-up as well as different vocal warm-ups.

Bigger changes happened between the Spring 2007 and Spring 2008 semesters. I was out of town more during the Spring 2008 semester due to serving as the assistant director of our senior showcase and presenting at the Southeastern Theatre Conference. I brought in two “guest artists” so my students could be more well rounded. Katie Bradley led a movement workshop and John Kenneth DeBoer led a vocal workshop. The students loved this and I felt they at least had a day of more in-depth work on body and voice.

Since my students had already performed in two person scenes, they now had the choice of either performing in another scene or directing a scene. The directors still had work which they had to turn in. Two of my upper classmen decided to direct. They were perfect for the job as they were both very responsible and detail oriented. It was interesting to see how they grew as actors when they now had to direct their peers. If we direct after we have acted, we have to find new ways of expressing ourselves to make sure our actors understand us; and it was so incredible to watch this process. They hated the fact that I would peek in on their rehearsals but the day to day growth was truly amazing.

As I mentioned before the other big change this semester was the creative project. I spent a day or two discussing the idea of telling a story and on their acting exercise days I incorporated different exercises using different types of art to tell a story. They didn’t realize it at the time but this helped them create when we got to this project.

I feel that if I hadn’t had the opportunity to teach BFA students I wouldn’t have known that I want to teach BA students and I wouldn’t have made the adjustment of being flexible and more creative in my own work.

Course Work at IPFW

In this chapter I will give a more detailed explanation of each class that I taught at IPFW and give examples of handouts and syllabi. It is important to note that both of these classes only last for one semester each. The students receive only four semesters of acting (unless they also take Fundamentals of Performance) because as BA students they have several other responsibilities in the program and their general education.

Fundamentals of Performance is an exploration of beginning acting techniques. Through acting exercises, improvisation, monologue and scene work the student will begin to attain the tools he/she needs to become an actor. The student can also start to apply these tools in class. The primary goal of this class for the university is to create an even playing ground between students so as they approach Acting I and production work they have the same knowledge and terminology to succeed.

Many students that decide to attend IPFW do so because it is a quality education at a minimal cost. Fort Wayne is the second largest city in Indiana (second to Indianapolis) and therefore is sometimes thought of as a big city by students from surrounding rural counties. IPFW just added dormitories as of Fall 2005 and this has aided in increasing the student population from outside the Fort Wayne area.

There is no official professional theatre in Fort Wayne. Wagon Wheel Theatre in Warsaw, IN. is the closest and it is 45 minutes away. Bower/North Productions, headquarters located in Fort Wayne, does pay its actors per show but it too is not a LORT house of any kind.

There are several community theatres in the area, however, as the arts are actually very important to this community. Needless to say, you don't see many Equity actors in Fort Wayne unless they are visiting family.

My point is that even the experienced student actors usually have not experienced a professional theatre; they may not have even seen a professional show, although the Indiana Repertory Theatre and the Phoenix Theatre are only 2 hours away and Chicago is about 3 hours away. Most of IPFW's theatre students have only experienced theatre in their high schools and some have performed in local community theatre and even taken classes or performed in shows at the Fort Wayne Youtheatre.

There are varying levels of experience in this community. Just because someone says they have been in several shows doesn't always mean they were good shows or with trained directors. So, when the Fundamentals of Performance class consisted of all majors (even Theatre) I tried to create an even playing ground so all were prepared for the next level in their acting journeys.

I am very strict with this particular class as this may be the first time these students have seen acting as a job or work instead of just playing around time. I do incorporate fun into the classroom but this is where they start to learn discipline as an actor. It is a very structured class. Once class time has started the door is locked and even if a student is one minute late, they are not allowed in. The student must learn to respect the craft as well as themselves and other actors with whom they work.

Since there are now fewer Theatre majors (if any) in this class the rules have changed a bit. I am no longer as strict with my students, but my students do learn what it takes to become an actor and how much work is involved.

I also focus on the primary Stanislavski system steps. As Americans have somewhat butchered Stanislavski's system and as he himself changed his system and let it evolve, I have also let my version of his system evolve. I explain to my students where these concepts came from but also make them aware that I am passing on my knowledge of these ideas. The primary terms I am concerned with are: Text, Subtext, Objectives, Obstacles, Tactics and Beats or Beat Changes. I then focus on the remaining system steps: Given Circumstances, Magic If, and Score. I will touch on Super Objective as well as Objective Hierarchy and will mention Recall if it is needed for a particular situation but we do not delve deep into these terms and/or concepts. I think it's important for the Fundamentals students to read Robert Barton's book, *Acting Onstage and Off* because Barton gives a very clear look at these terms as well as all of Stanislavski's terms. The whole book is great for the beginning actor and/or for the beginning non-actor to make sense of the psychology of acting.

Most of my acting exercises come from or are adapted from Viola Spolin as that was the first "how to teach acting" book that was given to me before I started teaching at the Fort Wayne Youtheatre in 1998. Since then I have come up with my own exercises or have stolen from others.

The two major exercises I still use in Fundamentals of Performance are what I call Topic Scenes and Fairytales. These both help the actor communicate with others, learn to tell a story, start to create characters on their own and many other tools the student actor will need.

For Topic Scenes, I split them into groups of three or four, depending on class numbers, and they are given a topic. (I always start off with “Rainbows” just to see what they do) They are then given 15 minutes to create their own story about this topic. They come up with the blocking; furniture/prop use, if any; characters; environment and so on and so forth. They then present these short scenes to the rest of the class. As they rehearse I walk around and watch. It is always interesting. There is always a natural leader that emerges. This leader either over dominates or starts to pass out duties to the other group members and more often than not it is very natural and organic and there are no problems. Any problems that do come up are resolved quickly as they know I am watching and they don’t have a lot of time.

I used this exercise for the same reasons when I taught middle school and 3 – 5 graders. However, the younger the students are the more animalistic it becomes. There are several more fights about who should lead; therefore this exercise can be used to explain how not only to communicate with each other but also how to incorporate everyone’s ideas and how to work together as a team. While it is a bit different, it’s sometimes very important for college age students to remember these tools. I sometimes think we should have politicians try this exercise out as well!

The Fairytales are one of the last exercises the students perform before they get into their actual performance (for a grade) work. I like to split them up into groups of 6 or 7. As a group, they decide which fairytale they will share. I give them 20 – 25 minutes for this exercise as the performance is generally longer. They sometimes have one big scene or several small scenes, it doesn’t matter what they choose as long as they tell the story. It must be their version though. I ask that they stay away from the “Disney” version and they can play different genders or for

instance if they are performing “Jack and the Beanstalk,” it may become “Jackie and the Beanstalk.”

Working with larger groups can become more difficult and usually students have one person writing an outline (or sometimes full script) so they can stay on track. This exercise helps them take an already established story and make it their own. It is wonderful for character work as sometimes they are playing more than one character. Because there is a time restraint the students still need to communicate and make choices quickly.

I always stress rehearsal time with all of these exercises. They should not be improvising while on stage but can improvise while creating. This helps them start to determine how much rehearsal time is needed when they get to their actual performances.

There are generally three performances in Fundamentals of Performance. First, an Open Scene, then Monologues and finally their final is a two-three person scene from an actual script.

Open Scenes consist of two actors (although I’ve adapted the one in Robert Barton’s book for three when there is an odd number of students in the classroom) with about 10 lines each. These sometimes seem nonsensical at first but the point is for the students to start working with an actual script but still having the creativity of making the scene their own. They decide where they are, who they are and what the conflict is. I have used this version or one similar to it for years and years and I have never seen the same exact scene twice. The story might be the same or similar but the telling of that story is always different because I always have different students.

I have the students choose their own monologues (1 – 2 minutes in length) because I want them to be comfortable with the subject matter, language, etc. I do have guidelines for these

though and you can find them at the end of this chapter. I must approve these pieces and the student must show me they have the full script. In other words, they can not just choose a piece from a monologue book.

I can generally have 10 – 15 minute working sessions with each student. This means the student must be prepared when I work with them. I suggest they read the full script several times and come in with thoughts about who the character is and why they are telling this story as well as being mostly off book. Due to time restraints, I stick to my 10 – 15 minutes and the students are told a head of time that if they are not prepared then I may not get through the whole piece with them.

I decide the partners for their final scenes but again they choose the scene. (4 – 5 minutes in length) I do approve the scene and will help them make cuts etc. as needed for time. I then have 25 minute working sessions with each group. The students must be prepared with all furniture, props and blocking by the time I work with them. I also have what I call pre-performances. The students have a chance to perform their scenes in front of everyone and must be off book, but can call for line. This helps them to see where they need help and I can give them additional notes before they perform the scene for a grade.

I have seen an abundance of growth in my Fundamentals students and I feel they are given a strong base of acting, discipline and theatre knowledge before they move to the next phase of acting.

Acting I at IPFW is a continuation of Fundamentals of Performance however, the students only have a monologue and a scene to perform so there is more individual time during the working sessions. There is usually a period of review at the beginning of the semester as

some students had different teachers for Fundamentals of Performance. *An Actor Prepares* by Stanislavski is also studied. While I still grade on each student's personal growth; if they can't comprehend the concepts discussed in this class their grade will suffer. It is important for them to fully understand these concepts in order to proceed to the next step in their acting journey.

The students write a very detailed paper on *An Actor Prepares* (the guidelines of which are at the end of this chapter) and I try to make them understand how the terms and concepts of acting are applied to their own work. If they can start to analyze their own work, it tends to become better.

The students are still allowed to select their own monologues and scenes, which I approve, but now they need to start choosing harder material. While we discuss types and what they are best suited for I allow them to choose roles that they may not get to play often. I believe it is important to challenge the students in the classroom as they may not get the challenges in production.

Our physical and vocal warm-ups become more detailed but after the first two weeks of class they need to have warmed up before we start class to save time. It is usually very apparent when they haven't done this and they know they will get attitude/participation points taken away if they aren't ready for class.

The following materials are included in this chapter: For Fundamentals of Performance: Spring semester syllabus and Summer semester syllabus; Character Analysis; Monologue/Final Scene search; and Open Scene (although this is in their book.) For Acting I: Syllabus and Guidelines for Acting I papers.

THTR - 134 Fundamentals of Performance Spring 2006

Room: WT 113
Instructor: Jane R. Frazier
Office Hours: By appointment
E-Mail: frazierj@ipfw.edu

MWF: 10 - 10:50 am
Phone: 481-6059
Office: VA 102,
 Dean's Office

Due dates and Performance dates may be changed by the instructor, please mark the changes accordingly! Please Keep this! If you still have it when I ask for it, you'll receive extra credit! Keep it with your Fundamentals supplies!

Text and Supplies: *Acting, Onstage and Off; 4th Edition; by Robert Barton.* Pencil, notebook, proper attire.

Requirements:

1. **Attendance.** Please be on time! You will be working with partners most of the time and should respect their need to rehearse as much as yours! Students are allowed up to three absences. *More than three and your grade will drop by one letter grade.* No Exceptions! There are no excused absences, if you are sick, etc. it counts as an absence!
2. **Be prepared for class.** Wear comfortable clothing that you can move in. No skirts! Always have your book, paper and pencil.
3. **Complete all assignments on time.** (Both written and performed) If you are absent on a performance day, you do not get to make it up!
4. **No eating or gum chewing allowed.** Bottled water is allowed.
5. **You must attend one performance of:**
Comedy of Errors Feb. 24, 25, March 2, 3, and 4 at **8 p.m. Sharp!** March 5 at **2 p.m. Sharp!**

And you must attend one performance of:

Story Theatre April 21, 22, 27, 28 and 29 at **8 p.m. Sharp!** April 30 at **2 p.m. Sharp!**
 You will need to pick up a show sheet (for each production) signed by the house manager to receive credit!

All shows are free with IPFW ID! If you would like to usher, I will give you a small amount of extra credit.

Box Office opens one week prior to opening night. Hours: Mon.-Fri. 1:30-5:30
 481- 6555

6. Extra credit will be given for seeing shows beyond these but you must talk to me first so I can approve it. You will need to turn in your program and/or ticket stub plus write a typed 2 page paper discussing the acting. (I'll give you more specifics when I approve the show)

Week 1 (Jan. 11-13)
Reading: Chapter 1

Week 2 (18 - 20)
Reading: Chapter 2

Week 3 (23-27)
Reading: Chapter 3

Week 4 (30-Feb. 3)
Reading: Chapter 4

Week 5 (8-10)
Reading: Chapter 5

Week 6 (13-17)
Reading: Chapter 6

Week 7 (20-24)
Reading: Chapter 7

Week 8 (27-March 3)
Performances of
Open Scenes: Feb. 27 & March 1
Reading: Chapter 8 (on March 3)
 Monologues must be approved by March 3rd!

Spring Break (6-10)

Week 9 (13-17)
 Monologues

Week 10 (20-24)
 Monologues

Week 11 (27-31)
 Monologues

Week 12 (April 3-7)
Performances of Monologues: April 3 & 5
 Final Scenes must be approved by April 7!

Week 13 (10-14)
 Rehearsal

Week 14 (17-21)
 Rehearsal

Week 15 (24-28)
 Rehearsal/
Final CA due April 28!

Week 16
Final: Wednesday, May 3 from 8 a.m. - 10 a.m.

Grading Scale:

Attitude/Participation	100
Attendance of <u>Comedy of Errors</u>	100
<u>Story Theatre</u>	100
Open Scene	100
Monologue CA	100
Monologue	100
Final Scene CA	200
Final Scene	200
Total	1000

1000-900	A
899-800	B
799-700	C
699-600	D
599-under	F

THTR - 134 Fundamentals of Performance Summer Session I

Room: WT 113
Instructor: Jane R. Frazier
Office Hours: By appointment

MTR: 10 a.m. - 12:20 p.m.
Phone: 481-6551 (Theatre office)
Email: fraziertheatre@yahoo.com

Please note: the instructor has the right to change anything on this syllabus and it is the student's responsibility to write these changes down! No assignments will ever be moved up!

Text and Supplies:

Acting, Onstage and Off, 4th edition; by Robert Barton. Paper, pencil and proper attire

Requirements:

1. **Attendance.** Please be on time! You will be working with partners most of the time and should respect their need to rehearse as much as yours! Students are allowed **one absence**. More than one, your grade will drop by one letter grade! Two lates equal one absence. No Exceptions! (This includes sickness)
2. **Be prepared for class.** Wear comfortable clothing that you can move in. Always have your book, paper and pencil.
3. **Complete all assignments on time.** (Both written and performed)
4. **No eating, drinking or gum chewing allowed.** Bottled water is allowed
5. Extra credit will be given for seeing shows approved by me first! You must bring a ticket stub and/or program and write a two page typed paper about the production. (Please discuss the acting, using terms and concepts that we have learned in this class - I probably already know the plot!)

Week 1 (May 14 – May 17)

Reading: Chapters 1, 2 and 3

Material Covered:

- Introduction to class / Review Syllabus
- Acting Histories and expectations
- Acting Terms
- Stage Areas and Pictures
- Physical warm up
- Breathing exercises
- Body awareness / Vocal awareness

Week 2 (May 21 – May 24)

Reading: Chapter 4

Material Covered:

- Introduction to pantomime
- Stanislavski's System / Exercises in his system
- Open Scene assignments
- Begin monologue search / Introduction to improvisation

Week 3 (May 29 – 31 – No class on Monday, May 28!)**Reading:** Chapters 5 and 6**Material Covered:**

Open Scene final preparation
 Improvisations

*Performances of Open Scenes: Thursday, May 31***Week 4 (June 4 – June 7)****Reading:** Chapter 7**Material Covered:**

Character Analysis
 Individual monologue rehearsals
 Script Study
 Final Scene assignments

Week 5 (June 11 – June 14)**Reading:** Chapter 8**Material Covered:**

Rehearsal Process
 Working sessions

*Performances of Monologues: Monday, June 11***Week 6 (June 18 – June 21)****Material Covered:**

Rehearsal

*Performances of Final Scene: Thursday, June 21***Grading Scale:****Points**

Attitude/Participation	150
Open Scene	150
Monologue	175
CA for Monologue	175
Final Scene	175
CA for Final Scene	175
Total	1000

1000 - 900	A
899-800	B
799-700	C
699-600	D
599- under	F

Character Analysis (CA) (For Monologues and final scenes)

*These questions should be answered from the Character's point of view, not yours! (Except maybe, the first 3 questions)

*If you can't find something in the script, make an educated guess!

*Detail, Detail, Detail! The more you know about the character the easier to play that character! Think of how well you know yourself!

1. Character's name
2. Play and author
3. Birth date (Month, Day, Year) (Think about when the play takes place, you can't be born in 1980 if the play takes place in 1978 and your character is 30 years old!)
4. My childhood was... (Not just great or bad, but why, there should be a ton of detail in this answer!)
5. Three people that have influenced me greatly **and why**:
 - a.
 - b.
 - c.
6. My religion and why:
7. Education
8. My favorite things to do:
 - a.
 - b.
 - c.
9. My favorite things to wear:
 - a.
 - b.
 - c.
10. Things I hate to do:
 - a.
 - b.
 - c.
11. I describe others as: (List specific quotes from the text)
 - a.
 - b.
 - c.
12. Others describe me as: (List specific quotes from the text)
 - a.
 - b.
 - c.
13. My Objective: (of the scene, not the whole play)
14. My Obstacle: (of the scene, not the whole play)
15. Do I achieve my objective?
16. How do I change at the end of the scene (or monologue)?

Anything else you would like to add!

Monologue and Final Scene Search

Monologue (1 – 2 min. in length)

Final Scenes (4 - 5 min. in length)

These will be performed off book!

*Must find full play! And it must be from a full length play, no one-acts!

*Nothing that was written before 1960!

* The character must be in your age range! (What age do you look like on stage, not necessarily how old you actually are!)

*Look at race. Sometimes it matters for the show and sometimes it doesn't matter at all. You'll need to investigate the play a bit to figure that out.

*Be careful of pieces that require a dialect!

*NO FILMS OR MUSICALS!

* No Shakespeare, Ibsen, Chekhov, Lorca, Tennessee Williams, O'Neill or C. Churchill!

Playwrights to look for:

Neil Simon, Beth Henley, Lorraine Hansberry, August Wilson, Tina Howe, Theresa Rebeck, Ken Ludwig, Sam Shepard, Lanford Wilson and the list goes on!

Plays that are good to look at: (Check when it was written though! If it was written in 1975 but takes place in the 1700's you probably won't get to do it!)

Barefoot in the Park - Neil Simon

Come Blow Your Horn - Neil Simon

A Coupla White Chicks Sitting Around Talking - Jon Ford Noonan

Fool For Love - Sam Shepard

Last of the Red Hot Lovers - Neil Simon

A Raisin in the Sun - Lorraine Hansberry

Two for the Seesaw - William Gibson

Crimes of the Heart - Beth Henley

Steel Magnolias - Robert Harling

Vanities - Jack Heifner

Fifth of July - Lanford Wilson

Fences – August Wilson

Prelude to a Kiss – Craig Lucas

Danny and the Deep Blue Sea – John Patrick Shanley

Sunday on the Rocks – Theresa Rebeck

Open Scene (taken from Robert Barton's book, *Acting Onstage and Off* – 4th edition)

1: Oh.

2: Yes

1: Why are you doing this?

2: It's the best thing.

1: You can't mean it.

2: No, I'm serious.

1: Please.

2: What?

1: What does this mean?

2: Nothing.

1: Listen.

2: No.

1: So different.

2: Not really.

1: Oh.

2: You're good.

1: Forget it.

2: What?

1: Go on.

2: I will.

THTR - 138 Acting I Spring 2006

Room: Williams Theatre, room 113
Instructor: Jane R. Frazier
Office Hours: By appointment
E-Mail: frazierj@ipfw.edu

MW: 3 - 4:15 p.m.
Phone: 481-6059
Office: VA 102, the Dean's Office

Due dates and Performance dates may be changed by the instructor, please mark the changes accordingly! Please keep this! If you still have it when I ask for it, you'll receive extra credit! Keep it with your Acting I supplies!

Text and Supplies: *An Actor Prepares*, by Constantin Stanislavski. *Acting One*, by Robert Cohen - 4th edition. Pencil, notebook, proper attire.

Requirements:

1. **Attendance.** Please be on time! The doors will lock when I start class, if you aren't here by then you will be marked absent! Students are allowed up to three absences. More than three and your grade will drop by one letter grade. No Exceptions! (Please note, this means if you miss 4 classes and you would have received an "A" you will receive a "B", if you miss 5 classes you will receive a "C", etc. If you are not physically in class then you are considered absent even if you have a fabulous excuse such as: Sickness, Dr.'s appointment, too much partying the night before, etc.)
2. **Be prepared for class.** Wear comfortable clothing that you can move in. (Think twice about skirts! Unless it's for a scene!) Always have paper and pencil and Acting One book on Acting Exercise Days!
3. **Complete all assignments on time.** (Both written and performed) If you are not here on a performance day, you do not get to make that performance up!
4. **No eating or gum chewing allowed.** Bottled water is allowed.
5. **You must attend one performance of:**
Comedy of Errors Feb. 24, 25, March 2, 3 and 4 at **8 p.m. Sharp!** March 5 at **2 p.m. Sharp!**

You must also attend one performance of:

Story Theatre April 21, 22, 27, 28 and 29 at **8 p.m. Sharp!** April 30 at **2 p.m. Sharp!**
 You will need to pick up a show sheet signed by the house manager and write a discussion paper on each show, please see the "Guidelines for Acting I Papers" at the end of this syllabus!

All shows are free with IPFW ID! If you would like to usher I will give you a small amount of extra credit.

Box Office opens one week prior to opening night.

Hours: Mon. - Fri. 1:30 - 5:30 p.m. 481-6555

Week 1 (Jan. 11) *No Class, Jan. 9!*

Wed. Warm - up / Trust Exercises

Week 2 (Jan. 18) *No Class, Jan. 16!*

Wed. Talk about Monologues & CA /Acting Exercises

Week 3 (23 - 25)

Mon. Acting Exercises

Wed. Carol Burnett Day

Week 4 (30 - Feb. 1)

Mon. Monologues must be approved today! / Acting Exercises

Wed. Acting Exercises

Week 5 (8) *No Class, Feb. 6!*

Wed. Monologue working sessions

Week 6 (13 - 15)

Mon. Same

Wed. Same

Week 7 (20 - 22)

Mon. Same

Wed. All meet: Review "An Actor Prepares" (This means it must be read by now!) / Acting Exercises

Week 8 (27 - March 1)

Mon. Perform Monologues / CA due

Wed. Perform

Spring Break (March 6 - 10)**Week 9** (13 - 15)

Mon. Turn in discussion paper about "Comedy..." / Discuss "Comedy...." / Talk about Final Scenes

Wed. Acting Exercises

Week 10 (20 - 22)

Mon. Paper over "An Actor Prepares" is due! / Acting Exercises

Wed. Acting Exercises

Week 11 (27 - 29)

Mon. Must have Final Scenes approved by today! / Rehearsal

Wed. Rehearsal

Week 12 (April 3 - 5)

Mon. Final Scene Working Sessions

Wed. Same

Week 13 (10 - 12)

Mon. Same

Wed. Same

Week 14 (17 - 19)

Mon. CA for Final Scene due! Pre - Performances - Off Book!

Wed. Same

Week 15 (24 - 26)

Mon. Same

Wed. Same

Week 16**Final Scenes**

Friday, May 5

1 p.m. - 3 p.m.

Discussion paper for "Story Theatre" is due at final!

Grading Scale

Attitude/Participation	100	1000 – 900	A
Monologue	150	899 – 800	B
CA for Monologue	100	799 – 700	C
Discussion Paper for "Comedy of Errors"	75	699 – 600	D
Final Scene	200	599 – or lower	F
CA for Final Scene	100		
Discussion Paper for "Story Theatre"	75		
Paper over "An Actor Prepares"	200		
Total Points	1000		

Guidelines for Acting I Papers

Each paper should have a font of 10 - 12 pt. No smaller, no larger!

Character Analysis (CA): Worth 100 pts. each (One for Monologue and one for Final Scene)

2 - 3 page paper, typed, double space

Paragraph format

You can write it from the character's point of view, or your own but not both!

Please include everything you can from the script, but you may need to, or want to add your own information based on what you read in the script.

Ex.: How do others describe you? How do you describe others? What is your religion? Education? What was your childhood like? How old are you? What are some of your viewpoints on life? Etc.

Remember, you have known yourself for how ever many years you have been here, you need to know your character for as many years as he/she has been here! The more you know about your character, the easier it will be to play him/her! (Just in case a bracelet falls off or something!)

Discussion Papers: Worth 75 pts. each (One for each show) You must also have a show sheet to receive full credit!

1 - 2 page paper, typed, double space

Paragraph format

This is basically an opinion paper, what did you like, what didn't you like, however you must be able to back up your opinions, don't tell me you didn't like an actor's portrayal of a role, because you wanted to be cast in that role, tell me using specific examples and terminology why you think they weren't believable, etc.

I want you to primarily talk about acting but if you would like to mention costumes, lights, stage design, etc. you may. Please don't make that your whole paper, this is an acting course.

Paper over "An Actor Prepares": Worth 200 pts.

13 - 15 page paper, typed, double space

Paragraph format

For each chapter of the book (Chapters 1 - 13; you may write about 14, 15 & 16 if you wish) you should have the following (at least):

One paragraph briefly giving a plot summary of the chapter; one paragraph explaining what acting terms / concepts the chapter dealt with; and one paragraph explaining how you use, or should use that information in your own acting. (This should be specific examples and can be from class work, current shows or past shows, but try to keep it as current as possible) If you haven't used these concepts in your class work, please start to! If you don't have specific examples of how you use these concepts you can discuss how you will in the future, but then please do use these in the future.

Course Work at VCU

In this chapter I will give a more detailed explanation of the Acting I class I taught at Virginia Commonwealth University. This class met for two consecutive semesters and was for theatre education, stage managers and theatre design students. I view this class as a hybrid of my IPFW Fundamentals and Acting I classes plus an added boost.

During my first year of teaching this class I found most of my students already had a strong theatre background and therefore exercises didn't take quite as long as they had at IPFW. I will be writing primarily about my second year of teaching this class as I added exercises and projects during this year.

The VCU Acting I students still performed an Open Scene and Final Scene but did not perform a monologue until second semester. There was also a more detailed observation exercise. Each student was to choose a person whom they saw on a regular basis and "follow" them for a week. They were to write detailed notes about how this person moved, talked, and acted. They were also to write down how this person's movement, etc. changed depending on the mood they were in. At the end of the week they turned in a typed paper about their person and then acted out their person in class. This helped them understand how their own movement and voice were different and how they might change things about themselves for a character.

I was also able to introduce pantomime to these students. We had many more hours of class time than at IPFW we were able to immerse ourselves in this world for a longer period of time. They were not allowed to use props for their open scenes but rather

had to pantomime them. The point was not to become polished in the technique but it forced them to be even clearer in their acting.

I also spent a lot of time during this year discussing how the concepts and terms they were learning in my class would relate to their specific jobs in the theatre. This was something I had always touched on before but now we had more time to deal with it and the students themselves would come up with their own ideas about their jobs.

Communication was also something we discussed a lot this year. I realize an acting class shouldn't always be lecture or discussion time, but as situations arised in the classroom they could relate it to what they were experiencing in their other classes.

I was also excited to have more time with each group when it came time for our working sessions for our final scenes. I bumped the time up to 30 minutes for each group; but again because we had so much more class time I told them we could have a second working session if the group decided they wanted that. Several groups did and it was very beneficial to their acting growth.

During the spring semester the students performed another 2-3 person scene plus a monologue. They were given the option of directing one of these scenes instead of acting in it and two brave souls chose to direct. I have included their specific duties at the end of this chapter.

We also worked hard on story telling. This was incorporated into everything we did and was emphasized during different acting exercises. One exercise that the students particularly liked and were very good at was something that I made up. I brought in different pictures, some literal, some more abstract and I laid them out on the floor. The

students were instructed to look at all of them and decide which they were drawn to the most. We ended up with some one person groups, some 2 or 3 person groups and some even larger. They then had to write a short paragraph explaining the story of that picture. Once this was done they had to create a scene using that picture. They could add more characters then were in the actual picture or take some out, whatever they wanted to do. At this point some groups that only had one person decided to merge with other single groups and would merge their stories, or pictures, together.

Another new exercise for them was story through music. They each had to bring in a 1 – 2 minute song and we all listened to them. Again, the students decided which song they liked the best and that formed their groups, again with different numbers of people. (And some were technically advanced enough to merge their songs together.) They then created a scene with that music. Each group had to again write out the story and they also had to label the theme, texture and tempo of the scene. Some students were very literal and some not; some choreographed it and some not. Their creativity amazed me and I think it amazed them as well.

After they performed their actual scenes it was time for a new graded assignment, their creative projects. They were to take one of the scenes they had just performed, whether it was theirs or another groups; and tell the story of that scene using minimal text but anything else they wanted to use. I encouraged the use of all art forms and they ran with it.

While not all of these pieces made total sense, they all told a story in a very unusual way. The dance, art and music that was incorporated was beautiful and it rejuvenated them as much as myself.

Many of these students would never need to act again for their careers, but I truly believe that all involved in the theatre need to be creative, not just for their jobs but for themselves.

THEA – Acting I Fall 2006

Room: SSPLY, 201

Instructor: Jane R. Frazier

E-Mail: frazietheatre@yahoo.com

MWF: 9:30 a.m. – 10:50 a.m.

Office Hours: By appointment

Due Dates and Performance dates may be changed by the instructor, please mark the changes accordingly! Please keep this! If you still have your syllabus when I ask for it, you will receive extra credit! Keep it with your Acting I supplies!

Acting I supplies: Pencil, notebook, proper attire

Requirements:

1. **Attendance:** Please be here and on time! Students are encouraged not to miss any class sessions. It is very important for you to be in class everyday so you don't miss important information and rehearsal time. You will be allowed a total of three absences for the semester. Your grade will go down one letter grad at the fourth absence, and continue to drop one letter grade with each additional absence. Tardiness in excess of 20 minutes will be considered a complete absence.
2. **Complete all assignments on time:** (Both written and performed) If you are not here on a performance day, you do not get to make that performance up!
3. **No eating or gum chewing allowed:** Bottled water is allowed.
4. **You must attend at least one performance each of the following two plays and write a critique paper over it:** The Nerd – Sept. 28, 29, 30, Oct. 5, 6, 7 at 7:30 p.m. and Oct. 1 & 8 at 2:30 p.m. and Medea – Nov. 9, 10, 11, 16, 17, 18 at 7:30 p.m. and Nov. 12 & 19 at 2:30 p.m.

Tickets are \$5 with your student ID. 804-828-6026 or theatretix@vcu.edu

Week 1 – Aug. 25: Introduction to class

Week 2 – Aug. 28 – Sept. 1: Theatre Terms / Stage directions and pictures

Week 3 – Sept. 6 – 8: Physical / Vocal Life

Week 4 – Sept. 11 – 15: Acting Exercises

Week 5 – Sept. 18 – 22: Observation exercises **due Sept. 18!** / Improv / Pantomime

Week 6 – Sept. 25 – 29: Open Scenes

Week 7 – Oct. 2 – 6: Open Scenes / Performances

Week 8 – Oct. 9 – 13: Discuss final scenes / Papers over The Nerd are **due Oct. 9!**

Week 9 – Oct. 16 – 18: Approve final scenes **by Oct. 16!** / Rehearsal

Week 10 – Oct. 23 – 27: Rehearsal

Week 11 – Oct. 30 – Nov. 3: Working sessions, you only need to come at your scheduled working session time. (Theatre Ed. Students are more than welcome to sit in on any or all working sessions!)

Week 12 – Nov. 6 – 10: Same

Week 13 – Nov. 13 – 17: All meet / Extra rehearsal time

Week 14 – Nov. 20 – 22: Rehearsal / Medea papers **due Nov. 20!**

Week 16 – Dec. 4 – 8: **Final Scene Performances**

Critique Papers:

Your papers over The Nerd and Medea must be typed, double space, 12 point font and two – three pages in length. Please discuss the acting! You may mention design elements, however, please remember this is an acting class! Discuss how the actors used (or didn't use) the terms and concepts that we discussed in class. This is an opinion paper, but you must be able to back up your opinion! Please feel free to ask me more about this!

Grading Scale

Attitude / Participation:	100
Attendance and Critique paper over <u>The Nerd</u> :	100
<u>Medea</u> :	100
Open Scene:	100
Scoring of Open Scene:	100
Observation exercise:	100
Character Analysis:	200
Final Scene:	200
Total for class:	1000 points

1000 – 900	A
899 – 800	B
799 – 700	C
699 – 600	D
599 and below	F

THEA – Acting I Spring 2007

Room: SSPLY, room 201 or 204

Instructor: Jane R. Frazier

E-Mail: fraziertheatre@yahoo.com

MWF: 9:30 a.m. – 10:50 a.m.

Office Hours: By appointment

Due Dates and Performance dates may be changed by the instructor, please mark the changes accordingly! Please keep this! If you still have your syllabus when I ask for it, you will receive extra credit! Keep it with your Acting I supplies!

Acting I supplies: Pencil, notebook, proper attire

Requirements:

1. **Attendance:** Please be here and on time! Students are encouraged not to miss any class sessions. It is very important for you to be in class everyday so you don't miss important information and rehearsal time. You will be allowed a total of three absences for the semester. Your grade will go down one letter grade at the fourth absence, and continue to drop one letter grade with each additional absence. Tardiness in excess of 20 minutes will be considered a complete absence.
2. **Complete all assignments on time:** (Both written and performed) If you are not here on a performance day, you do not get to make that performance up!
3. **No eating or gum chewing allowed:** Bottled water is allowed.
4. **You must attend at least one performance of the following two plays and write a critique paper over it:** When You Comin' Back Red Ryder? And Smokey Joe's Cafe
Tickets are \$5 with your student ID. 804-828-6026 or theatretix@vcu.edu

Week 1

Wed. Jan. 17: Re-group! Discuss Syllabus!

Fri. Jan. 19: Warm-up / Improvs

Week 2

Mon. Jan. 22: Improvs / Discuss group scenes (must be approved by Feb. 2nd!)

Wed. Jan. 24: Stanislavski's system steps

Fri. Jan. 26: Acting exercises

Week 3

Mon. Jan. 29: 1st, 2nd, 3rd circle energy

Wed. Jan. 31: Acting exercises

Fri. Feb. 2: Approve group scenes / sign up for working sessions

Week 4

Mon. Feb. 5: Bring calendars – write rehearsal schedule / rehearse
 Wed. Feb. 7: Rehearsal schedules due for group scenes! / rehearse
 Fri. Feb. 9: Rehearse

Week 5

Mon. Feb. 12: Working sessions
 Wed. Feb. 14: Working sessions
 Fri. Feb. 16: **No class! Opening of The Most Massive Woman Wins**

Week 6

Mon. Feb. 19: Working sessions
 Wed. Feb. 21: Working sessions (only if needed)
 Fri. Feb. 23: Working sessions

Week 7

Mon. Feb. 26: All Meet! Papers due for Red Ryder / Pre-performances
 Wed. Feb. 28: Pre-performances
 Fri. March 2: Performances (CA's due)

Week 8

Mon. March 5: Performances (CA's due)
 Wed. March 7: **No Class – SETC**
 Fri. March 9: **No Class – SETC**

Week 9

No Class – Spring Break!

Week 10

Mon. March 19: Approve Monologues
 Wed. March 21: Hand outs from Stanislavski's An Actor Prepares
 Fri. March 23: Acting exercises

Week 11

Mon. March 26: Acting exercises
 Wed. March 28: Review hand outs
 Fri. March 30: Test over Hand outs

Week 12

Mon. April 2: Rehearsal schedules due for Monologues! / Working sessions with full class!
 Wed. April 4: Working sessions with all
 Fri. April 6: Working sessions with all

Week 13

Mon. April 9: Working sessions with all
 Wed. April 11: Working sessions with all
 Fri. April 13: Working sessions with all

Week 14

Mon. April 16: Work with coaches (should be off book by now)
 Wed. April 18: Performances of Monologues / CA for Monologue due!
 Fri. April 20: Performances of Monologues / CA for Monologue due!

Week 15

Mon. April 23: Papers due for Smokey Joe's / Create your own performance piece
 Wed. April 25: Work on Performance piece
 Fri. April 27: Perform pieces!

Critique Papers:

Your papers over Red Ryder and Smokey Joe's must be typed, double spaced, 12 point font and **two - three** pages in length. Please discuss the acting! You may mention design elements, however, please remember this is an acting class! Discuss how the actors used (or didn't use) the terms and concepts that we discussed in class. This is an opinion paper, but you must be able to back up your opinion! Please feel free to ask me more about this!

Grades

Attitude / Participation	100
Rehearsal Schedule (GS)	50
Group Scenes	150
Paper for <u>Red Ryder</u>	100
CA for Group Scenes	150
Rehearsal Schedule (M)	50
Monologue	100
Paper for <u>Smokey Joe's</u>	100
CA for Monologue	100
Test over Hand outs	100

Total number of points 1000

Grading Scale

1000 – 900	A
899 – 800	B
799 – 700	C
699 – 600	D
599 – under	F

THEA – Acting I Fall 2007

Room: SSPLY, room 302

Instructor: Jane R. Frazier

E-Mail: fraziertheatre@yahoo.com

MW: 9:00 a.m. – 10:50 a.m.

Office Hours: By appointment only

Due Dates and Performance dates may be changed by the instructor, please mark the changes accordingly! Please keep this! If you still have your syllabus when I ask for it, you will receive extra credit! Keep it with your Acting I supplies!

Acting I supplies: Pencil, notebook, proper attire - *You do not have to dress in all black, however you must wear clothes you can move in (sweat pants, yoga pants, loose t-shirts, etc.) as we will be moving around a lot. No jewelry is allowed! I will dock you 10 points each day that you do not follow dress code and after the fifth day you will not be allowed back in class!*

Requirements:

1. **Attendance:** Please be here and on time! Students are encouraged not to miss any class sessions. It is very important for you to be in class everyday so you don't miss important information and rehearsal time. You will be allowed a total of two absences for the semester. Your grade will drop one letter grade at the third absence, and continue to drop one letter grade with each additional absence. Tardiness in excess of 20 minutes will be considered a complete absence. If you are late to class twice that is considered a complete absence.
2. **Complete all assignments on time:** (Both written and performed) If you are not here on a performance day, you do not get to make that performance up!
3. **No eating or gum chewing allowed:** Bottled water is allowed.
4. **You must attend at least one performance each of the following two plays and write a critique paper over it:** Volume of Smoke and Dracula

What to Know and Do to be prepared for emergencies at VCU

1. Sign up to receive VCU text messaging alerts
(<http://www.vcu.edu/alert/notify>) Keep your information up-to-date.
2. Know the safe evacuation route from each of your classrooms. Emergency evacuation routes are posted in on-campus classrooms.
3. Listen for and follow instructions from VCU or other designated authorities.
4. Know where to go for additional emergency information
(<http://www.vcu.edu/alert>)
5. Know the emergency phone number for the VCU Police (804-828-1234)
Report suspicious activities and objects.

Week 1 (Aug. 27 – 29)

Introduction to class / Trust exercises

Week 2 (Sept. 5 – **No class Sept. 3**): Theatre Terms / Stage directions and pictures

Week 3 (Sept. 10 – 12): Physical / Vocal Life

Week 4 (Sept. 17 – 19): Acting Exercises

Week 5 (Sept. 24 – 26): Observation exercises **due Sept. 24!** / Improv / Pantomime

Week 6 (Oct. 1 – 3): Open Scenes

Week 7 (Oct. 8 – 10): Open Scenes / Paper over Volume of Smoke is **due Oct. 8!** /

Performance of Open Scenes on **Oct. 10!**

Week 8 (Oct. 15 – 17): Discuss final scenes / Acting exercises

Week 9 (Oct. 22 – 27): Acting exercises

Week 10 (Oct. 29 – 31): Approve final scenes **Oct. 29!** / Rehearsal

Week 11 (Nov. 5 – 7): Working sessions, you only need to come at your scheduled working session time. (Theatre Ed. Students are more than welcome to sit in on any or all working sessions!)

Week 12 (Nov. 12 – **No class Nov. 14**): Working sessions

Week 13 (Nov. 19 – **No class Nov. 21**): Paper over Dracula **due Nov. 19!** / Extra Rehearsal

Week 14 (Nov. 26 – 28): Pre-Performances

Week 15 (Dec. 3 – 5): Pre-Performances / Character Analysis **due Dec. 3!** / Performance of final scene on **Dec. 5!**

Critique Papers:

Your papers over Volume of Smoke and Dracula must be typed, double spaced, 12 point font and two - three pages in length. Please discuss the acting! You may mention design elements, however, please remember this is an acting class! Discuss how the actors used (or didn't use) the terms and concepts that we discussed in class. This is an opinion paper, but you must be able to back up your opinion! I will discuss this more in class!

Character Analysis:

I will hand out a list of questions and discuss this when we get closer to the due date. The paper must be typed, double spaced, 12 point font.

Grading Scale

Attitude / Participation:	150
Attendance and Critique paper over <u>Volume of Smoke:</u>	100
<u>Dracula:</u>	100
Open Scene:	100
Scoring of Open Scene:	100
Observation exercise:	100
Character Analysis:	150
Final Scene:	<u>200</u>
Total for class:	1000 points

1000 – 900	A
899 – 800	B
799 – 700	C
699 – 600	D
599 and below	F

THEA – Acting I Spring 2008

Room: SSPLY, room 204

Instructor: Jane R. Frazier

E-Mail: fraziertheatre@yahoo.com

MW: 9 a.m. – 10:50 a.m.

Office Hours: By appointment

Due Dates and Performance dates may be changed by the instructor, you are responsible for writing these changes down and adhering to them. Please keep this! If you still have your syllabus when I ask for it, you will receive extra credit!

Acting I supplies: Pencil, notebook, proper attire

Requirements:

1. **Attendance:** Please be here and on time! Students are encouraged not to miss any class sessions. It is very important for you to be in class everyday so you don't miss important information and rehearsal time. You will be allowed a total of three absences for the semester. Your grade will go down one letter grade at the fourth absence, and continue to drop one letter grade with each additional absence. Tardiness in excess of 20 minutes will be considered a complete absence.
5. **Complete all assignments on time:** (Both written and performed) If you are not here on a performance day, you do not get to make that performance up!
6. **No eating or gum chewing allowed:** Bottled water is allowed.
7. **You must attend at least one performance of the following two plays and write an acting critique paper over it:** For Colored Girls... and Cabaret
Tickets are \$7 with your student ID. 804-828-6026 or theatretix@vcu.edu

What to Know and Do to be prepared for emergencies at VCU

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2. Know the safe evacuation route from each of your classrooms. Emergency evacuation routes are posted in on-campus classrooms.
3. Listen for and follow instructions from VCU or other designated authorities.
4. Know where to go for additional emergency information
<http://www.vcu.edu/alert>
5. Know the emergency phone number for the VCU Police (804-828-1234)
 Report suspicious activities and objects.

Week 1

Mon. Jan. 14: Re-group! Discuss Syllabus!

Wed. Jan. 16: Warm-up / Review terms

Week 2

Mon. Jan. 21: **No Class!**

Wed. Jan. 23: acting exercises

Week 3

Mon. Jan. 28: acting exercises

Wed. Jan. 30: acting exercises

Week 4

Mon. Feb. 4: TBA

Wed. Feb. 6: Scene must be approved by today!

Week 5

Mon. Feb. 11: Rehearse scenes

Wed. Feb. 13: Rehearse

Week 6

Mon. Feb. 18: Rehearse

Wed. Feb. 20: Rehearse

Week 7

Mon. Feb. 25: Present Scenes / CA's due! / Papers over For Colored Girls... due!

Wed. Feb. 27: TBA

Week 8

No Class this week – SETC starts Wednesday!

Week 9

No Class – Spring Break!

Week 10

Mon. March 17: Carol Burnett Day

Wed. March 19: Improvs

Week 11

Mon. March 24: Rehearse Creative Projects

Wed. March 26: Rehearse

Week 12

Mon. March 31: Rehearse

Wed. April 2: Present Creative Projects

Week 13

Mon. April 7: Approve monologues / acting exercises

Wed. April 9: Rehearse with coaches

Week 14

Mon. April 14: Rehearse with coaches

Wed. April 16: Working sessions with me and coaches

Week 15

Mon. April 21: Working sessions

Wed. April 23: Working sessions

Week 16

Mon. April 28: Present monologues / CA's due / Papers over Cabaret due!

Critique Papers

Your papers over For Colored Girls... and Cabaret must be typed, double spaced, 12 point font and **two - three** pages in length. Please discuss the acting! You may mention design elements, however, please remember this is an acting class! Discuss how the actors used (or didn't use) the terms and concepts that we discussed in class. This is an opinion paper, but you must be able to back up your opinion!

Grades

Attitude / Participation	150
Rehearsal Schedule (Scenes)	75
Scenes	100
Paper for <u>For Colored Girls...</u>	100
CA for Scenes	100
Creative Project	100
Rehearsal Schedule (M)	75
Monologue	100
Paper for <u>Cabaret</u>	100
CA for Monologue	100

Total number of points 1000

Grading Scale

900 – 1000	A
800 – 899	B
700 – 799	C
600 – 699	D
599 and under	F

Note to Student

By choosing to remain in this class, you agree to abide by the rules of the class and agree that you have read this syllabus and know what is expected of you. If you have any questions please talk to me as soon as possible.

Director's Duties for Acting I scenes

- You must always be present for all rehearsals
- You must lead your rehearsals, but be considerate of your actors, contrary to popular belief they are not cattle and do have minds of their own; but remember this is your concept. Set goals for yourself and your actors, but not unrealistic ones!
- You must stay in contact with me about what is happening!
- If possible, I would like to come to at least one of your blocking rehearsals; schedule your rehearsals first then see when I am available.

Response Paper

Write a three-four page response about your experience. (Typed, double spaced, 12 point font.) What worked? What didn't? What would you change or do differently next time? Etc.

Identify: Theme, Texture and Tempo of the scene.

Was it easy to get the actors to do what you wanted them to? How did you accomplish that? Please include any research you may do for these scenes.

The paper is due on performance day.

Some very basic directing notes

There are several different methodologies of directing out there. Some say a director should never touch an actor and should never show an actor what to do or give a line reading. I personally feel that sometimes actors need to be touched (within reason) and if you have tried to let the actor discover what you want by giving the note three different ways and it still isn't getting through to them, a line reading can make a world of difference to them. (Explain to your actors why you feel it should be read that way. Don't be afraid to discuss things with your actors) Communication can set you free! While you are the director of this piece sometimes this can create power struggles between you and your peers. Please try to create a safe, nurturing environment; again, Communication can set you free!

Please ask me questions, communicate with me, and let me know what you are experiencing, etc. especially if a problem arises!

Character Analysis

You will still need to write a character analysis in last semester's format; however, you can decide which character from this scene you will write about.

Issues in the Classroom

There are always some issues that arise while teaching and in this chapter I will discuss a few of those and explain how I dealt with them. I believe there are several ways of handling a situation just as there are several ways to teach.

Number of Students

In a perfect world, each acting class would have an even number of students; however, it is not a perfect world. I have had to adapt many assignments for a group of three. The easiest of which would be the Open Scene. I just adapted the Open Scene in Mr. Barton's book. While this is a bit harder to be creative with, I've never had a group not able to make it work but I know I must give that particular group a little bit more time.

The harder assignment for a group of three is actual scene work. You would be amazed how hard it is to find an even weighted scene for three people. I have found the best combination is three women. *Five Women Wearing the Same Dress* by Alan Ball works really well for beginning actors. There are several scenes the ladies can choose from so they feel they still have some control over their work. While I like the students to choose a piece from a full length play, I do allow a group of three to choose a scene from a one act or 10 minute play so the students have more choices.

Race/Ethnicity

Race/Ethnicity in the classroom may or may not create issues while choosing monologues and scene work. Every teacher will approach this differently; however I tell my students that while they are looking for material, they do need to look at race as sometimes it matters and sometimes it doesn't matter to the overall message of the story or particular moment in the play.

I once had a young African American male student want to play Big Daddy in *Cat On A Hot Tin Roof*. Well, I knew immediately he didn't really look at this show nor did he look at my directions, which specifically state: no Tennessee Williams, stay in your age range, and look at race. I realize that this show has now played Broadway with an all black cast, however, the actors in that production are trained and seasoned performers. It is much harder to tackle this role with a beginning actor and if we start putting stylized concepts on monologues and scene work there is no time left to work on the acting. I did not allow him to use this piece, but perhaps another teacher would.

I also had a white male student want to play a Latino character and during this specific monologue the character talks about what it was like to be a Latino in his particular city. I couldn't allow it. I thought at first, well, maybe this student knows someone like this, possibly a best friend or neighbor, but after talking with the student it was apparent he did not. He had no idea what this Latino character was about and again, we didn't have time to research it.

I have found that it is harder to find material for Asian students; but at the same time, I have found most beginners don't care if they perform something written originally

for a person who is not of their race. I do believe this becomes a bigger issue the more acting classes they have had. They get bored with playing roles that they don't necessarily connect to by race.

Attendance/Time

Most schools and/or departments have rules to deal with a student who is working on a production but misses classes or homework for a class or classes due to their involvement in that production. I remind the students they have a certain amount of absences for the semester and how they use those is up to them. (And they should think about their semester schedules)

Most students are worn down during productions and it can take some time to learn how to manage their time and still eat and sleep, etc. However, at VCU there is usually a day of class (during tech week) when at least half of my students are physically in class but not there mentally or emotionally. It is hard to berate them when I know they may have been up since 4 or 5 a.m. painting the set or finishing props, etc. because the powers that be have asked them to be there that late. While I don't necessarily agree with this work ethic (if you would like to call it that) I can relate to them and as a teacher I need to evaluate the mood and/or state of my students and teach accordingly. In other words, I need to know when I can push them, how far I can push them and when not to push them. My time here at VCU has helped me discover that as well as learn that.

Simple Philosophy

My teaching philosophy is ever changing depending on the situations I am faced with; but I have learned that what I always valued and thought the most important thing about teaching is still the same – the students. If we are not here for them, why are we here? Yes, we can make our careers grow with the shows we direct, with the papers we write and the conferences we present at and all of this in turn helps our students become better theatre practitioners but sometimes I feel we forget the simplest of issues. I hope to continue my quest to educate myself and my students.

VITA

Jane R. Frazier was born in Fort Wayne, Indiana in 1976. She graduated with a Bachelor of Arts in Theatre from Indiana University – Purdue University, Fort Wayne in May of 2000. She has performed in over eighty shows and some of her favorite roles include Baker's Wife in *Into the Woods*, Flora in *Flora the Red Menace*, Jackie in *The Hot'l Baltimore*, Judith Bliss in *Hay Fever* and Josie in *A Moon for the Misbegotten*. Jane was awarded an Irene Ryan nomination for her portrayal of Rosalind in *As You Like It* and for Edith in *Edith Stein*. She won the Best Actress in a Musical award from Arena Dinner Theatre's 1999 – 2000 season for Polly in *Crazy for You*.

Jane was the assistant director for The Richmond Triangle Players production of *Christmas with the Crawfords* as well as VCU's production of *Dracula* and directed *The Most Massive Woman Wins* in VCU's studio theatre all in Richmond, Virginia. She was also the assistant director for IPFW's production of *Merrily We Roll Along*; The Fort Wayne Civic Theatre's productions of *The Sound of Music* and *Beauty and the Beast* all in Fort Wayne, Indiana.

Jane taught acting at the Fort Wayne Youtheatre from 1998 – 2006 and also taught in the Department of Theatre at Indiana University – Purdue University from 2001 – 2006.